

Society of Friends Meeting House
Fair Street at Ray's Court
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-966

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. MASS-966

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

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68-

Location: Fair Street at Ray's Court (on west side of Fair Street and south corner of Ray's Court), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Present Owner: Nantucket Historical Association

Present Occupant: Nantucket Historical Association

Present Use: Exhibition

Brief Statement of Significance: Old landmark associated with important history of Quakers on Nantucket and first building owned by the Nantucket Historical Association.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

1838 -- Erected for use as a Quaker school by The Society of Friends.

1864 -- Taken over for the Friends Meeting House.

1894 -- Nantucket Historical Association bought for \$1000.

2. Date of erection: 1838

(See 100 Years on Nantucket, Inquirer and Mirror, 1921)

3. Architect: Unknown

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: No plans known. When the building was a school there were two floors, one for girls and one for boys.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The building appears today as it did when it was used for the Friends Meeting House from 1864 to 1894. The second floor was removed except for a portion at the east end that was made into a balcony that extended approximately a third of the length of the building. In recent years the balcony was closed to form a room which could be heated for year-round use. A raised platform was constructed inside at the west end and was where the elders sat in meeting.

The pews and hard seats of the elders came from the original Fair Street Meeting House, a large two-story structure erected in 1833 to the south of the present building which was originally the Friends School. This earlier Meeting House was taken down and away from the Island.

The fire-proof museum building was erected in 1904 abutting the northwest corner of the Meeting House, and at that time a window was closed and a door added.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: This building was erected originally as a Friends School and was known as "Johnnie Boadle's School". He and Alice Mitchell were the teachers.

The Friends Meeting House next south was removed in 1864 as the Meeting was losing its power and prestige and its numbers were fast diminishing. The smaller building became the Meeting House and has been so called ever since.

One of the first organizational meetings of the Nantucket Historical Association was held in the Friends Meeting House, at which time it was agreed to acquire it as an old and valuable landmark which would serve as Association headquarters. Here were assembled the first exhibits and here were held the Association and Council meetings.

In 1904 the need of a fire-proof building was recognized and one was built adjacent to the Meeting House. All the exhibits were moved into it and the old building was restored to its status as the Friends Meeting House.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph taken shortly after purchase in 1895 in Historic Nantucket, July, 1954; photograph of present interior in Historic Nantucket, July, 1954; photograph of exterior in 106 Views by John Henry Robinson, 1911; photograph in Brief Historical Data, by Joseph Ellis Coffee Farnham, 1915; photograph in 100 Years on Nantucket, by Inquirer and Mirror, 1921.

2. Bibliography:

Dell, Burnham H. Quakerism on Nantucket. Nantucket:
Nantucket Historical Association, 1955.

Starbuck, Alexander. The History of Nantucket. Rutland,
Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1969.

Worth, Henry Barnard. "Quakerism on Nantucket Since
1800," Nantucket Historical Association Bulletin,
Vol. 1, Bulletin 1, 1896.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
September, 1969

PART 11. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Simple mid-nineteenth century wood frame assembly building changed from a two-floor school to a place of worship; wood frame, clapboard exterior, wood stoop, hip roof, brick chimney with cowl, carpenter classic window and door trim.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent, with large quantities of original fabric, modifications are minor but obvious.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 22' - 5" by 43' - 5".
2. Foundations: Brick foundation walls, running bond, painted grey, vents and door to crawl space below first floor.
3. Wall construction: Clapboard with 3" average exposed, painted grey, butt joints, studs 18" o.c. average cornerboards; shingle exterior south elevation, 5" exposure features grey.
4. Structural system: Wood frame, 3" by 6" studs where exposed, 1" by 12" sheathing behind shingles; corner posts boxed or obscured by interior finish; two tapered wood columns below front edge of balcony.
5. Chimney: Brick chimney with vaulted brick cowl; originates at second floor.
6. Stoop: Wood stoop and steps of 2" by 6" boards, brick piers; tapered square newels, molded handrail, mortise and tenon construction.

7. Openings:

a. Doorway and doors:

East entrance: Four-panel door, simple carpenter classic trim, two outswinging doors.

b. Windows: Plank window frames, mortise and tenon, dowel fasteners, sills and head trim project beyond stiles, twelve-over-twelve single hung sash; thin muntins and glass with irregular surfaces; wire screen panels and/or storm sash in some openings.

8. Roof: Hip roof, composition shingles; boxed eaves, wood gutters, sheet metal downspouts, stone splashers.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: Entry from stoop at Fair Street elevation; narthex, stairway to balcony, lavatory closet and doorway to sanctuary; sanctuary with wood board bench seating, central aisle; nave with wood board pews and bench facing congregation separated by cross aisle and wood chancel rail; doorway to adjacent museum; doorway to south closed, covered at exterior with shingles.

b. Balcony: Stairway from narthex to balcony, balcony space closed off from sanctuary with wainscot and two- and four-panel doors; chimney, stucco finish in this space with gas space heater (chimney has thimble for stove pipe closed); used as office-work space.

2. Stairway: "L" shaped stairway at southeast corner between narthex and balcony; wood board handrails; vertical beaded edged sheathing of staircase extended to provide screen at balcony level, topped with molded handrail.

3. Flooring: Wood boards average 14" - 22", painted dark grey and orange-brown.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and ceiling painted white, horizontal beaded board wainscot painted grey.

5. Doorways and doors: Simple wood trim, four-panel doors, board and batten door at south elevation.

6. Decorative features and trim: Very plain carpenter trim, no decoration, wood peg hanging hooks in narthex, wood

grill container for umbrellas and walking sticks; louvered shutters in west wall probably cover window fragments closed by museum addition; doors and board wainscot show plane marks.

7. Notable hardware: Thumb latches of cast and wrought iron operate wood bars pivoted at center of door and moving in vertical guides, drop into wood keys on door jamb, some with latch string.
8. Lighting: Modern electric; tin sconces and candles in sanctuary.
9. Heating: Gas-fired space heater in balcony space.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The Friends Meeting House is on the west side of Fair Street; a museum administered by the Nantucket Historical Association, built 1904-1905, is to the north and west of this structure (monolithic concrete, wood frame construction, George W. Watson, architect, and Aberthaw Co., builder, also builder of Harvard Stadium). A marble shaft at the northeast corner of the site placed there by William Mitchell in 1840 marks the "Southern Extremity of the Town's Meridian Line" (See HABS MASS-183 for measured drawings of Meridian Stones), capped wood picket fence at sidewalk edges. Ray's Court is paved with clam shells, Fair Street is asphalt.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A.
Nantucket, Massachusetts
August 7, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the 1969 Historic American Buildings Survey summer project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fourth project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramiez, July 1971.